

Florid Key National Marine Sanctuary, Post Office Box 500368, Marathon, Florida 33050. Comments will be available for public review at the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary office at 5550 Overseas Highway in Marathon during normal business hours.

Scoping meetings are being held as follows:

October 27, 1998: 2–5 p.m.—

Washington D.C., Department of Commerce Main Auditorium, 14th Street and Constitution Avenue.

October 29: 3–8 p.m.—Ft. Myers Convention Center.

November 9: 3–8 p.m.—Key West Holiday Inn Beachside.

November 10: 3–8 p.m.—Marathon High School.

November 17: 3–8 p.m.—Miami, location to be determined and announced through local media outlets.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Billy D. Causey at (305) 743–2437 ext. 26.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary was designated by an act of Congress entitled the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and Protection Act (FKNMSPA, Pub. L. 101–605) which was signed into law on November 16, 1990. The Sanctuary was designated to protect the 2800 square nautical mile ecosystem surrounding the Florida Keys, including the third largest barrier reef system in the world. A Final Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the Sanctuary was issued in 1996 and final regulations to implement the plan went into effect in July 1997.

The Final Management Plan and regulations established one Ecological Reserve (ER) in the Middle Keys (Western Sambo Ecological Reserve). An ER is defined as an area of the Sanctuary consisting of contiguous, diverse habitats, within which uses are subject to conditions, restrictions and prohibitions, including access restrictions, intended to minimize human influences, to provide natural spawning, nursery, and permanent residence areas for the replenishment and genetic protection of marine life, and also to protect and preserve natural assemblages of habitats and species within areas representing a broad diversity of resources and habitats found within the Sanctuary (15 CFR 922.162). Consumptive uses such as removing, taking or damaging coral, fish or seagrass are prohibited in an ER. During the development of the Draft

Management Plan, NOAA had proposed an additional ER in the Tortugas area within the Sanctuary but deferred the process to establish a boundary or regulations for the Tortugas ER until after implementation of the Final Management Plan. This process, estimated to take approximately two years and referred to as “Tortugas 2000,” will include coordination with the National Park Service, fishing representatives, scientists, and others. There will also be extensive opportunity for public input.

This notice announces NOAA’s intent to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and hold scoping meetings on the proposed project. Formal scoping meetings are scheduled as detailed above. The public is invited to attend the scoping meetings to provide oral or written comments. Interested persons may also submit written comments to the address above.

(Federal Domestic Assistance Catalog Number 11.429 Marine Sanctuary Program)

Dated: October 8, 1998.

John Oliver,

*Policy, Management, and Information Officer
National Ocean Service.*

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 100698C]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Public Scoping Meeting; Avoiding Interactions Between Steller Sea Lions and Pollock Fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Region

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce (DOC).

ACTION: Notice of scoping meetings.

SUMMARY: Under the Endangered Species Act, section 7 consultations are being conducted on the pollock fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands region and their potential effect(s) on the endangered western population of Steller sea lions and on their critical habitat. If the consultations result in a determination that the pollock fisheries jeopardize the survival and recovery of the western population or adversely modify their critical habitat, then reasonable and prudent alternatives will be required to

avoid these effects. NMFS announces two public scoping meetings to discuss the fisheries’ potential impact on Steller sea lions and on their critical habitat and possible mechanisms for implementing any necessary reasonable and prudent alternatives.

DATES: The meetings are scheduled as follows:

1. October 23, 1998, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Seattle, WA

2. October 26, 1998, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Anchorage, AK

ADDRESSES: The meetings will be held at the following locations:

1. Seattle—Alaska Fisheries Science Center, (Room 2039, Building 4), 7600 Sand Point Way, NE, Seattle, WA 98115

2. Anchorage—Anchorage Federal Building, (Room 154), 222 West 7th Avenue, Anchorage, AK 99513

To request special accommodations, contact Ursula Jorgenson, Protected Resources, Alaska Region, NMFS, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802, 907–586–7235.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Tim Ragen, 907–586–7248.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Pollock fishing in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands region may affect the status and trends of the endangered western population of Steller sea lions or its critical habitat and may impede the recovery and conservation of this population. If NMFS determines that the pollock fisheries jeopardize the continued existence of this population or adversely modify its critical habitat, then reasonable and prudent alternatives will be required. NMFS has scheduled the scoping meetings specified to provide the public an opportunity to discuss possible interactions between the fisheries and sea lions and measures to avoid such interactions.

Special Accommodations

The meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Ursula Jorgenson at the NMFS Regional Office at least 5 days prior to the hearing date (see **ADDRESSES**).

Authority: 16 U.S.C. *et seq.*

Dated: October 7, 1998.

Bruce C. Morehead,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
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